

Running from God

The statistics are alarming: Fewer teenagers attend church today than ever. If we don't reach them soon, we will face a spiritual crisis.

On the way home from church one Sunday several years ago my brother, Ralph, became an unassuming hero. He pulled out of the church parking lot, following a car with two teenage girls in it. About a mile down the road, a pick-up truck ran a stop sign and slammed into the side of the girls' car.

Instantly, the car exploded. The driver, 16-year-old Ashley, was thrown from the vehicle and killed. The other girl, 14-year-old Amy Cifranic, was trapped inside the burning vehicle.

Ralph jumped from his car and pried open the door of the burning vehicle. He grabbed Amy by the belt loop and managed to drag her from the car. Soon the paramedics arrived and took her to the hospital.

When I called to congratulate my brother on the rescue, I asked him: "What were you thinking? I mean, what was going through your mind as you approached the car?" I still remember his response.

"I didn't do anything that anyone else in my position would not have done. When the car is on fire, you do whatever you have to do to get the girl out!"

If we saw a car explode in front of us, the shock of what we had just seen would stun us. Few among us would simply drive by and act as if nothing had happened. Yet many Christians are standing by watching flames engulf our teens and doing nothing

to rescue them.

I'm here to tell you, the car is on fire-and it's up to us to do something about it.

Nation at a Crossroads

I'm not writing just to move you to care a little bit. A pattern is developing right under our noses here in America that demands our attention as Christians.

It is a well-documented fact that the percentage of Bible-based believers (evangelicals) has been steadily decreasing since the Builder generation. In his book *The Bridger Generation*, Thom S. Rainer gives the following statistics:

1. 65 percent of Builders (born from 1910 to 1946) are evangelical
2. 35 percent of Boomers (born from 1946 to 1964) are evangelical
3. 15 percent of Busters (those born from 1965 to 1976) are evangelical
4. 4 percent (projected) of Bridgers, aka Millennials (born after 1977) are or will be evangelical.

Our nation has the proud heritage of being founded on Christian principles. Many of our Founding Fathers were godly men. For two centuries we have enjoyed a society in which the moral imperatives from Scripture have kept some restraint on our lifestyles.

However, as the majority of the population has ceased to hold core Bible-based beliefs, societal standards and guidelines have changed. There is no longer a potent majority who screams

loudly when traditional biblical values are violated.

Let's look at the influence of the Boomers on society. As a result of their shift away from godly principles, we now have:

5. increasingly perverse TV, movies and music
6. Internet access to 4.2 million pornographic Web sites
7. legalized gay marriage or civil unions in some states
8. removal of Christian symbols such as nativity sets and the Ten Commandments from public places
9. any evidence of Christianity removed from public holidays and government logos
10. 50 percent of marriages ending in divorce.

If we are already facing such evidence of moral depravity and anti-Christian sentiment, what will our society be like with a population that is only 4 percent evangelical?

Imagine a society that mocks the fact that "under God" was ever in our Pledge of Allegiance. Imagine "In God We Trust" taken off our money. Imagine all references to Christ and His cross taken off all emblems and city logos (as is already happening).

Imagine a world in which a pastor can go to jail for saying homosexuality is wrong (as recently happened in Sweden). The current generation of 12- to 17-year-olds is the largest group viewing porn on the Web. What percentage of their marriages will stay together?

Where will this new generation take us? What sort of world will our children and grandchildren grow up in? Will we be guilty of allowing ourselves to be the last generation in America that had the benefit of a strong Christian ethic in our moral codes? Will the sacrifices of our forefathers be for

naught for the generations that are to come?

We Must Act Now

Studies have shown repeatedly that nearly 80 percent of people who come to Christ do so before the age of 21. Something happens to us at that age. All of a sudden, we think we know it all.

What does that mean for us? If we do not reach our youth now, in 10 years we will have a whole new set of challenges in America.

The time before our children leave their childhood years and become young adults is the most moldable time in their lives. During these years morals and values are being shaped. Unfortunately, they are often being shaped by those in the media industry who are motivated by the need to make a profit rather than a desire to promote moral standards.

Many adults know that kids are having a hard time, but they don't fully realize what the enemy is doing to destroy kids. We all need to know the world our kids live in so we can be a part of the answer.

The good news is we do know. We can do something. In fact, we can do a lot-if we will.

There is a holy urgency burning in my soul to capture the heart of this generation now while there is still an openness to the gospel. I believe the next five to seven years will determine the direction they take.

This is our moment, our defining moment. What we do in this season will determine the next 100 years of American history. The actions we take now will determine whether or not America is still the main mission-sending force in the world. Because American culture dominates the world in so many ways, the fate of millions here in America and around the globe is in our hands.

What can we do? How can we fight the effects of MTV, Hollywood and the music industry? We need a strategic battle plan.

Through prayer and discussions with a number of leaders across the land, I have devised what I believe is an effective battle plan to rescue the current generation of youth. The plan contains three phases: